Page 3114 - 3118 **DOI:** *https://doi.org/10.63108/IJLMH.13088*

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 9 | Issue 5

2026

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From a Ramp to an Accessible Journey: What RTI Disclosures Reveal About Railway Accessibility Governance

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ABSTRACT

Indian Railways has a detailed accessibility framework, yet the lived experience of a passenger with disability depends on whether multiple elements work together across the entire journey. A series of Right to Information (RTI) replies received from North Western Railway in 2026 provides a useful window into how accessibility is recorded, planned and governed at divisional level. The disclosures show both positive infrastructure planning and a recurring administrative fragmentation: information on lifts, station amenities, grievance redressal and boarding assistance is held by different departments and often answered separately. This article argues that railway accessibility should be measured as an end-to-end passenger journey and monitored through a unified, station-wise accessibility dashboard rather than isolated facility counts.

Keywords: *Disability rights, Indian Railways, accessibility, RPwD Act 2016, RTI, universal design, North Western Railway*

I. ACCESSIBILITY IS A JOURNEY, NOT A SINGLE FACILITY

For a passenger with disability, a railway journey begins long before boarding the train. It may involve accessible parking or drop-off, a usable entrance, ticketing and enquiry counters, signage, tactile guidance, toilets, drinking water, inter-platform transfer, lifts or ramps, boarding assistance, an accessible coach interface and a functioning grievance mechanism. A failure at any one of these points can make the entire journey inaccessible.

This is also the logic of the accessibility guidelines notified by the Ministry of Railways in 2023. The framework is not limited to ramps. It covers information systems, station accessibility, platform accessibility (including inter-platform transfer by foot over bridge, subway and lift), train-coach accessibility, and monitoring and feedback.[1] The Rights of Persons

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[1] MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAILWAY BOARD), Notification F.No.2019/Stn.Dev.-I/03/06/Policy/PwDs (Nov. 13, 2023), notifying *Guidelines on Accessibility of Indian Railway Stations and Facilities at Stations for Differently Abled Persons (Divyangjan) and Passengers with Reduced Mobility*, GAZETTE OF INDIA, Extraordinary, pt. I, sec. 1, No. 297 (Nov. 21, 2023), https://indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/GATI-SHAKTI/2023/250190_merged.pdf.

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with Disabilities Act, 2016 similarly treats accessibility and access to transport as statutory obligations rather than discretionary welfare measures.[2]

Section 40 of the Act requires the Central Government to make rules laying down standards of accessibility for the physical environment, transportation, information and communication, and other facilities and services provided to the public. Section 41 requires the appropriate Government to take suitable measures to provide facilities for persons with disabilities at bus stops, railway stations and airports conforming to accessibility standards for parking spaces, toilets, ticketing counters and ticketing machines. Section 44 withholds building permission and completion certificates from establishments that do not adhere to those rules, and section 45 required existing public buildings to be made accessible within five years of the rules being notified, while directing the appropriate Government and local authorities to formulate and publish an action plan, based on prioritisation, for providing accessibility in all their buildings and spaces providing essential services, railway stations among them.[3] The railway guidelines were incorporated into these accessibility rules in March 2024 as clause (l) of rule 15(1) of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules, 2017.[4] In November 2024, in *Rajive Raturi v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court held that rule 15(1), which largely prescribed recommendatory guidelines rather than mandatory rules, was *ultra vires* the scheme and legislative intent of the Act, and directed the Union Government to delineate a baseline of non-negotiable rules under section 40, while making clear that progressive compliance with the existing standards should continue.[5]

II. What the 2026 RTI record shows

RTI applications filed in February 2026, and the replies received from different offices of North Western Railway, provide a revealing picture. The record contains responses from the Ajmer, Jaipur and Jodhpur divisions and from different railway departments. Taken together, the documents show that accessibility work is occurring, but that the information architecture around it remains fragmented.

A reply from the Electrical (General) Department of the Jaipur Division to RTI application No. JDNWR/R/T/26/00114/1 of 20 February 2026 illustrates both progress and fragmentation. The

[2] The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 49 of 2016, India Code (2016), https://www.indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/13684.
[3] *Id.* §§ 40, 41(1)(a), 44, 45.
[4] The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules, 2017, G.S.R. 591(E), r. 15(1)(l) (India), *inserted by* The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Amendment) Rules, 2024, G.S.R. 175(E) (Mar. 8, 2024).
[5] *Rajive Raturi v. Union of India*, 2024 INSC 858, ¶¶ 66, 74–77 (India), https://api.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2005/9321/9321_2005_1_1503_56986_Judgement_08-Nov-2024.pdf.

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department expressly stated that station-wise details of facilities available to disabled passengers, and lists of unavailable facilities, did not pertain to the Electrical (General) Department. It nevertheless supplied a detailed programme for lifts and escalators, because those items did fall within its jurisdiction.[6]

The same reply recorded lifts as already installed at Jaipur and Kishangarh and gave prospective installation timelines for several stations, including Bandikui, Dausa, Jhunjhunu, Khatipura, Khairthal, Raigarh, Kanakpura and others, extending into 2027. It separately listed escalators as installed at Jaipur and Durgapura and gave future timelines for stations including Kishangarh, Khatipura, Rewari, Phulera and Getor Jagatpura.[7] This is useful planning information. Yet it also demonstrates why a passenger cannot understand the accessibility of a station merely by contacting one department.

Another Jaipur Division response, dated 13 March 2026, enclosed a station-wise accessibility matrix prepared with reference to the Gazette notification of 13 November 2023. The matrix records multiple parameters, such as parking, accessible approach, ticket counters, toilets, drinking-water arrangements, tactile signage or pathways and inter-platform transfer arrangements.[8] A matrix of this type is far closer to a meaningful accessibility audit than a simple statement that a station has a ramp.

Ajmer Division replies similarly supplied lists of stations and responded separately to questions on station accessibility, accessibility audits and funds. In one reply, dated 10 March 2026, the division enclosed a list of stations while treating accessibility-audit information as belonging to the concerned departmental record.[9] In another, dated 27 May 2026, the division identified the designated Grievance Redressal Officer for persons with disabilities under the framework of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.[10] A June 2026 reply addressed the availability of temporary boarding-ramp arrangements at identified stations.[11]

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[6] RTI reply of the Electrical (General) Department, Office of the Divisional Railway Manager, Jaipur, North Western Railway, to RTI Application No. JDNWR/R/T/26/00114/1 dated Feb. 20, 2026, Computer No. 197245, issued Mar. 2026 (on file with the author).

[7] *Id.*

[8] RTI reply of the Jaipur Division, North Western Railway, dated Mar. 13, 2026, enclosing station-wise accessibility information prepared with reference to the Gazette of India notification of Nov. 13, 2023 (on file with the author).

[9] RTI reply of the Ajmer Division, North Western Railway, No. C-358/RTI/1247/2026, dated Mar. 10, 2026, concerning stations declared accessible and accessibility-audit information (on file with the author).

[10] RTI reply of the Ajmer Division, North Western Railway, dated May 27, 2026, concerning the designation of the Grievance Redressal Officer for persons with disabilities under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (on file with the author).

[11] RTI reply of the Ajmer Division, North Western Railway, No. C-358/RTI/1357/2026, dated June 13, 2026, concerning temporary boarding-ramp arrangements for disabled passengers (on file with the author).

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III. THE CENTRAL GOVERNANCE PROBLEM: DEPARTMENT-WISE DATA, PASSENGER-WISE BARRIERS

None of these replies, viewed individually, necessarily indicates non-compliance. The more important finding is structural. Railway administration is organised department-wise, while disability is experienced journey-wise. Electrical departments manage lifts and escalators; engineering units deal with much of the built environment; commercial and operating branches may hold information on counters, assistance and passenger services; other offices hold grievance or advisory records. The passenger, however, encounters all of these as one continuous service.

This mismatch creates three problems. First, accessibility status can be difficult to establish from official records without filing multiple RTI applications. Second, a station may appear strong on one parameter but remain inaccessible because another link in the chain is missing. Third, accountability becomes diffuse when no single public-facing record identifies whether the complete station journey is accessible.

IV. WHY "ACCESSIBLE STATION" NEEDS A MORE EXACT MEANING

An accessible station should not be defined merely by the presence of one or two amenities. A lift that connects only selected platforms, a ramp that is too steep, a tactile path that terminates before the ticket counter, or an accessible toilet that is locked can each defeat formal compliance. The 2023 railway accessibility guidelines themselves reflect a broader universal-design approach and divide accessibility into interconnected domains.[12]

A credible statement of a station's accessibility should therefore answer a functional question: can a passenger with a mobility, visual, hearing or other disability, independently or with predictable assistance, complete the entire station journey safely and with dignity? This requires outcome-based verification, not merely inventory-based reporting.

V. RTI AS AN ACCESSIBILITY GOVERNANCE TOOL

The RTI process has value beyond obtaining documents. It can reveal where responsibility sits, whether records exist, which works are planned, whether grievance structures have been designated and where information gaps remain. Repeated use of RTI can also create a baseline against which subsequent improvement may be tested.

[12] MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAILWAY BOARD), *supra* note 1, at 28–29 (Introduction).

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The method becomes much stronger when three forms of evidence are combined: official RTI disclosure, an on-site accessibility audit against prescribed standards, and follow-up verification of corrective work. This approach reduces reliance on anecdote and allows disability-rights advocacy to engage institutions with measurable evidence.

VI. A PRACTICAL REFORM: ONE STATION, ONE ACCESSIBILITY DASHBOARD

Indian Railways should consider a unified, public, station-wise accessibility dashboard. For each station, it could display the status of accessible parking and approach, ticket and enquiry counters, assistance points, toilets, drinking water, tactile pathways and signage, lifts, escalators and ramps, inter-platform transfer, boarding assistance, accessible coaches and grievance-contact details. Each item should carry a status such as "available", "partially available", "under work" or "not available", along with the date of last verification.

Such a dashboard would not require a new legal philosophy. The underlying obligations and standards already exist. It would instead solve an information and accountability problem, converting scattered departmental records into a passenger-centred public statement of accessibility.

VII. CONCLUSION

The North Western Railway RTI record shows that accessibility planning is not absent. Lifts and escalators are being installed or scheduled, station-wise matrices exist, grievance structures have been identified and boarding-assistance arrangements are being recorded. At the same time, the replies demonstrate that accessibility information is dispersed across departments and documents.

The next stage of accessibility governance should therefore move from counting isolated facilities to measuring an end-to-end journey. A railway station is accessible only when its individual components work together for the passenger who needs them. RTI can help expose that gap; transparent, unified and independently verifiable accessibility reporting can help close it.

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